

## VII. ACTION PLAN 2000-2005

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an action plan for improving the state parks system based on an evaluation of the current system, trends affecting the system, an evaluation of the significant natural resources in North Carolina, and the public's needs for recreation resources, as discussed in previous chapters.

The actions are grouped into the following categories: interpretation and education, natural and cultural resource protection, park operations, capital improvements, planning, public awareness, community outreach and system expansion.

### INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION

**GOAL: Interpretation and education programs should encourage visitors to understand, protect and enjoy the resources of the state parks system.**

Develop the structure and by-laws for an Interpretation & Education (I & E) Council. After the I & E Council is operational, its primary task will be to develop a strategic plan for Interpretation and Education.

Over the next five years, the following new permanent positions should be established and filled to implement Phase II of the state parks museums capital expansion program: one Parks Museum Curator, a second Exhibits Coordinator (Museum Construction/Renovation Project Manager), two Exhibit Designer/Researchers, and one Artist Illustrator. To implement Phase III of the program, the following positions should be established and filled to provide for the design, construction, and renovation of smaller, trailside exhibitry: one Exhibit Designer, one Carpenter II and a General Utility Worker.

Complete the current capital improvement museum projects: Carolina Beach, Crowders Mountain, Hammocks Beach, Kerr Lake, Lake Waccamaw, Mount Mitchell, Weymouth Woods, and William B. Umstead.

Work towards acquiring a permanent position for a Division Environmental Educator who can assist the I & E Specialists in completing and revising the state park Environmental Education Learning Experiences (EELEs).

Revise and expand the basic EELEs for the following operational units: Cliffs of the Neuse, Crowders Mountain, Falls Lake, Fort Fisher, Fort Macon, Goose Creek, Hanging Rock, Jockeys Ridge, Jones Lake, Kerr Lake, Lake James, Lake Waccamaw, Merchants Millpond, Pettigrew, Raven Rock, Singletary Lake, Stone Mountain, and Weymouth Woods. NOTE: A basic EELE contains only three activities, whereas a complete EELE has nine or more activities that span several grade levels and learning abilities.

Develop a complete EELE for the following new parks: Lumber River and Gorges.

Place field-tested EELE activities on the Division's web site so that educators can search a database and download activities to meet the learning needs of their students.

Develop a new database to collect and compile the I & E statistics that have been requested by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. After the software and database have been tested and refined by the I & E Specialists, rangers should be trained to use the new system and input their own data directly into the database.

Begin training park staff in methods of interpretive planning. Interpretive programs should correspond with the park's primary interpretive themes. In addition, interpretive plans could be created for new park facilities such as interpretive centers, nature trails, amphitheaters, accessible fishing piers, etc.

Re-classify the current History Museum Specialist position to reflect the actual work required of the Division's Exhibits Coordinator.

Develop a systematic, coordinated approach for disseminating information about the I & E programs, exhibits and EELEs to teachers, scout leaders and other appropriate individuals.

## **NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION**

### **Stewardship**

**GOAL: Long term stewardship of natural and cultural resources in the parks will be conducted in a systematic, consistent and professional manner.**

- Develop resource management guidelines for additional high priority issues.
- Expand prescribed burning in fire adapted communities in Piedmont and mountain parks.
- Develop exotic plant control plans for high priority projects as identified in the 1999 survey.
- Develop nuisance animal management plans at parks with nuisance raccoons and wild boar.

### **Scientific Research**

**GOAL: Scientific research projects which contribute to the park's stewardship information needs will be encouraged and supported.**

- Make significant progress towards the completion of up-to-date park-specific inventories to determine the presence and condition of plants and animal species, soils, water and air quality and natural community types.

- Develop vegetation maps for the ten highest priority parks in a GIS format.
- Develop and fund long-term cooperative research agreements with research institutions for high priority research needs.
- Implement park-specific long-term biological monitoring programs to assess changes in the condition of natural resources at the highest priority parks.

### **Landscape Planning**

**GOAL: The parks will be protected and managed as components of larger landscapes.**

- Continue to develop cooperative relationships with local agencies and communities so that park protection is considered and addressed in local development plans.
- Develop landscape-level plans to address the highest priority water quality problems at individual parks and begin implementation.
- Incorporate landscape-level considerations in park acquisition planning, including linkage to other public and privately protected areas and trails, and the provision of wildlife corridors.

### **Environmental Review and Compliance**

**GOAL: Park facilities will be planned, designed, constructed and maintained to minimize adverse impacts to the natural and cultural resources of the parks.**

- Review park construction projects and recommend changes if needed to ensure minimal environmental impact and compliance with applicable environmental laws and regulations.
- Develop guidelines that provide design and construction standards suitable for park construction projects.
- Improve communication between construction and resource management staff and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the environmental review process. Conduct annual meetings of compliance and construction project staff to ensure that all parties are up to date on current compliance laws and regulations and the construction process.
- Create existing and planned facility GIS datasets for use in environmental compliance and park planning efforts.

### **Future Needs**

- Improve system wide stewardship by establishing district level resource management staff positions.
- Develop resource management training standards, including the duties and training needs for a lead resource management ranger and a syllabus for resource management skills training.
- Increase program staff's proficiency and skills by attendance at appropriate workshops, conferences, and academic classes.
- Develop a source of funding to meet scientific research, inventory and monitoring needs.

### **LAND ACQUISITION**

**GOAL: Make each park large enough to protect the park's natural features and also provide sufficient land for the development of recreational facilities.**

- Address 40 percent of identified land acquisition needs for the state parks system.
- Determine extent of unknown boundaries and locate 50 percent of them.
- Convert 50 percent of the closed property database to a GIS format.

### **PARK OPERATIONS**

**GOAL: Provide visitor services, provide for public safety, operate and maintain park areas and facilities, provide interpretation and education and manage and protect natural resources in a manner that will provide high-quality visitor experiences and enhance understanding of park resources.**

Improve visitor services by allocating sufficient professional staff to serve and protect park visitors during all operating hours.

Seek to increase annual maintenance funds to a reasonable percentage of physical accounts value in order to adequately maintain park facilities.

Increase staff training to improve productivity and safety in the workplace.

Evaluate using cooperating associations to increase park programs and revenues.

Develop and adopt disaster preparedness guidelines in order to provide improved search and rescue procedures.

Increase district operations and technical support staff to improve field staff training, technical expertise and organizing projects involving staff from several parks, such as controlled burns.

## **CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS**

**GOAL: Construct high-quality, cost effective recreational and support facilities appropriate to park purposes that will serve all park visitors and enhance park operation.**

Reduce the capital improvement project needs list through funding from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

Expand handicap accessibility to state park facilities. All new projects will provide accessibility in accordance with the standards of the American Disabilities Act. Pursue multiple funding opportunities for modifications to existing facilities.

Continue to use the Project Evaluation Program (PEP) to establish priorities for funding capital improvement projects.

Develop standardized designs for washhouses and implement other standard designs.

Pursue new technologies appropriate for state parks. Explore using recycled materials, low waste systems, renewable energy and energy savings. Use environmentally friendly materials.

## **PLANNING**

**GOAL: Develop comprehensive, resource-based plans for each park and a systemwide plan - using input from park visitors, park staff, park advisory committees, the general public and other stakeholders - that will guide protection of representative examples of North Carolina's natural heritage and also provide for appropriate recreational and educational use of park areas.**

Continue to use the general management planning process to develop capital improvement and land acquisition plans for each park unit that represents a consensus in DPR.

Complete general management plans that have not been approved. Initiate general management plans for state parks system units that do not have general management plans (Carolina Beach, Cliffs of the Neuse, Jones Lake and Lake Waccamaw State Parks and Fort Fisher State Recreation Area).

Continue to automate mapping of state parks system units using a geographic information system (GIS) to locate buildings, visitor facilities, roads and trails. Complete half the park system units.

Study and poll park visitors to determine the length of an average visit to a state park, the average expenditures a park visitor makes during a trip to a state park and visitor preferences about recreational park facilities and policies.

Update the Systemwide Plan for the State Parks System.

Incorporate park advisory committee views and comments into planning at individual park units. Also, consider the impact of outside activities on the integrity of parks as well as the park's impact on adjacent properties.

Add two planners to the Division staff to insure that capital improvement and land acquisition plans remain up to date.

## **PUBLIC AWARENESS**

**GOAL: The public should have easy access to information that is useful to park visitors and educates North Carolinians about the mission of the state parks system.**

*Yours to Discover Brochure* – Enlarge and update the Division's systemwide *Yours to Discover* brochure with the goal of publishing the brochure in a book format that will allow more detail on each park.

General Information Brochures – Continue to publish and update park general information brochures, printing a brochure for the Division's newest park, Gorges State Park.

The Steward – Continue to publish the Division's monthly newsletter, *The Steward*. Revamp the publication's style and seek ways to publish the newsletter electronically.

Website – Continue to develop and enhance the Division's website to include pages on all Division programs, a kid's page and other items of interest.

Video – Seek funding to produce a brief informational video on the Division and its program.

Marketing – Work with other DENR natural resource agencies to market the Department's agencies and to promote the resources of the Division.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

**GOAL: Public involvement provides good communication with stakeholders and creates opportunities to volunteer.**

Park advisory committees continue to communicate with and support the park superintendent by fulfilling their basic responsibilities identified in chapter two “System Evaluation”.

State park volunteers continue to be trained to work independently in long-term positions to allow state park units to operate more efficiently.

## **SYSTEM EXPANSION**

**GOAL: Expand existing parks where needed and add new parks in order to adequately protect representative examples of the state’s natural heritage.**

Expand Lake James State Park to the north shore and operate as a state recreation area, offering water-based recreational activities.

Develop a ranked master list of potential state parks, state natural areas, state recreation areas and state rivers.

Pursue the establishment of two new state rivers which add significantly to diversity and resource theme representation in the state parks system.

Pursue the establishment of at least two state natural areas which add significantly to diversity and resource theme representation in the state parks system using the information contained in chapter IV “Resource Evaluation” and chapter VI “Expansion Plan”.

Pursue the establishment of two state parks that will add significantly to diversity and resource theme representation in the state parks system using the information contained in chapter IV “Resource Evaluation” and chapter VI “Expansion Plan”.

Promote local government utilization of PARTF matching grants to purchase areas of local or regional significance as identified in the natural heritage program inventory.

Meet/consult with regional non-profit land trusts for purposes of information exchange and setting priorities for land acquisition.